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Discussion Paper: Reporting to Northern Albertans

Prepared by:
Northern Alberta Development Council
February 2003

Northern Alberta Development Council
Postal Bag 900-14 • Peace River, Alberta • T8S 1T4
Phone: 780-624-6274 • Fax: 780-624-6184
Email: nadc.council@gov.ab.ca
Website: http://www3.gov.ab.ca/nadc

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To Conference Registrants

Thank you for registering for **Challenge NORTH 2003: Opportunities • Strategies • Success.**

Your participation and involvement will contribute to the ongoing development of Northern Alberta. We need to develop strategies to maximize our many northern opportunities, and turn them into an enhanced economy and quality of life. This conference is a chance to build on the significant progress we have made in past years.

It is essential for the Northern Alberta Development Council to meet with leaders of the private and public sectors, at conferences such as this, to discuss northern issues. The strength and perseverance of a collective voice is an important factor in creating awareness of northern opportunities, issues, and challenges, and promoting northern solutions. Your advice on effective strategies for development will help the NADC establish priorities for its business and operation plans for the next three years.

The attached report is intended to stimulate discussion at **Challenge NORTH 2003,** on priorities for the social and economic development of Northern Alberta, and recommendations for action to turn these into realities. Although not exhaustive, this report reviews the issues raised on previous occasions and the follow up action that NADC was able to take within its mandate.

Your participation is welcome and necessary if the conference is to have a productive outcome in directing the future of Northern Alberta. I look forward to seeing you there.

Yours very truly,

Gary Friedel

Gary Friedel
Chair
Northern Alberta Development Council
MLA for Peace River

Alberta
NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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The NADC area covers 60% of Alberta and has about 10% of the provincial population.

REPORT OVERVIEW

Purpose of this Report

The intent of this report and the **Challenge NORTH 2003 Conference: Opportunities, Strategies, Success** is to stimulate discussion that will advance opportunities, and help create practical strategies for development in Northern Alberta. The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) urges delegates to discuss this report prior to the conference with colleagues and neighbours, and to consider the following important questions:

- *What practical strategies are required to advance social and economic development in Northern Alberta?*
- *How is development to be balanced with protection of the environment?*
- *What must be done to address Northern Albertans' needs and improve the quality of life?*
- *Who should be responsible for the strategies and how should it be done?*

Northern Alberta Today

Opportunities

The economic outlook of Northern Alberta is very promising. Northern Alberta contributes significantly to Alberta's economic strength through its rich petroleum, forestry and agriculture resources. Total investment growth in the North is estimated to be well over $57 billion over the next ten years. Northern Alberta has a wealth of potential in value-added industries, in the non-energy minerals sector, and an abundance of tourism opportunities. The NADC facilitates the realization of economic opportunities through successful partnerships with northern communities and people.

Challenges

Realizing the available opportunities requires that many challenges must be addressed. Following are some specific questions to be considered:

- How can Northern Albertans improve their competitiveness in global markets, and overcome challenges such as the distance to markets, transportation costs and infrastructure barriers?
- What can be done to soften the economic impacts of external factors such as: the Kyoto Accord, the United States' softwood lumber tariffs, and drought?
- How can the region reduce its vulnerability to the ups and downs of resource extraction and export activity? How should we diversify the economy and capitalize on the region's potential to create stability?
- Many communities have not shared in the benefits of development in the North. What needs to be done to address social and community issues that limit the quality of life, economic growth, attraction and vitality of the North? How can services be better delivered?
- How can the northern work force be developed to meet forecasted demands?
- How can Northern Albertans increase the awareness of northern opportunities and the needs of the region?

Socio-Economic Highlights

Demographics are a key factor in planning strategies for development of Northern Alberta. The North is made up of a collection of cities, municipalities, First Nations, Métis Settlements, rural and remote communities. There are a number of statistics that identify the region - specifically that it has a young, growing population. Consider these when reviewing this report, and when considering strategies for northern development.

The following is a brief summary of demographic data. **Challenge North 2003** participants will receive more detailed demographic and economic information at the conference.

- There are approximately 276,000 people living in the North. The NADC area covers approximately 380,230 square kilometers, which is about 60% of Alberta's total area. Only 9.3% of the province's total population lives in the region, including 51% of Alberta's Aboriginal population.
- Over a third of northerners live in rural areas. As of the 1996 census, 35% were rural dwellers and 65% were urban (living a small or large urban community).
- Population levels are growing in some areas, but decreasing in others. The population in major centres increased more than 18% from 1991 to 2001, while some rural municipalities made large gains in population and others lost part of their population in that same time period.
- The high school completion rate is 69% for Northern Alberta and 72% for the rest of Alberta. In some northern school divisions, the average completion rate is 45%.
- The population of Northern Alberta is generally younger than the rest of Alberta. However, the population is also on average getting older. Northern Alberta has higher percentage of ages of 0 to 20 years old than the rest of Alberta while the province has a slightly higher percentage of the baby boomers and seniors.

Northern Alberta is experiencing a high level of investment in a wide range of sectors. The following lists major projects valued at over $2,000,000 within the NADC region.

Projects	Investment (Millions)
Chemicals & Petrochemicals	$31
Commercial/Retail and Residential	$61
Forestry & Related	$271
Infrastructure *	$1,794
Institutional	$382
Mining	$30
Other Industrial	$2
Oil, Gas & Oilsands	$50,277
Pipelines *	$2,369
Power	$591
Residential (Housing and Apartment Developments)	$53
Telecommunications *	$300
Tourism/Recreation	$199
Total	**$56,360**

* Includes projects that extend beyond the NADC region
Source: Alberta Economic Development, January 2003

The Northern Alberta Development Council

The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) was established in 1963. The Council has nine public members and one elected member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Council membership reflects the geographic, cultural and vocational diversity of Northern Alberta.

NADC reports to Cabinet through the Honourable Pearl Calahasen, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (who also was on the Council as an MLA from 1989 to 1993). Gary Friedel, the MLA for Peace River, has been the NADC Chair since 2001. The Honourable Guy Boutilier was Chair from 2000 to 2001 and the Honourable Mike Cardinal chaired the Council from 1998 to 2000.

Appointed NADC members during the last three years:

Art Avery	Fort McMurray	1999-2003
Sandra Cardinal	Kikino/Lac La Biche	2000-present
Doris Courtoreille	Kinuso	2000-present
Berkley Ferguson	Athabasca	2000-present
Ernie Isley	Cold Lake	1999-2003
Gerald McIvor	Whitecourt	1998-2002
Pete Merlo	Grande Prairie	2000-present
Gary Pollock	Swan Hills	2002-present
Michael Procter	Peace River	2000-2003
Al Toews	Fort Vermilion	1999-2003

Mandate of the Northern Alberta Development Council

The Northern Alberta Development Council Act states that:

The functions of the Council are to investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in Northern Alberta, and to advise the Government thereon, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the Council may investigate the requirements of the people resident in Northern Alberta and make recommendations thereon in respect of

- *social and economic development;*
- *development of communities and service delivery; and*
- *development of government services and programs.*

NADC's Business Plan

NADC's mission is to identify and implement measures that will advance northern development, as well as advise government on opportunities and issues. Over the last three years, NADC has focussed on three main goals:

1) To receive input into and identify information on priority northern development opportunities and issues.
2) To promote opportunities and address barriers to the North's development.
3) To increase northern skill levels.

Establishing Priorities

The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) hosts workshops, conferences and community and business leaders' roundtable meetings to provide northerners the opportunity to discuss and stimulate action on specific topics. Conferences such as **Challenge NORTH 2000: Planning for Progress,** and **Challenge NORTH 2003: Opportunities, Strategies, Success** focus on major trends, challenges and solutions. These meetings help guide NADC's strategic planning process in developing its three-year business and annual operation plans.

Challenge NORTH 2000: Planning for Progress

The conference was held in Grande Prairie March 29-31, 2000. Over 280 key business and community leaders discussed challenges and opportunities they believed were critical to the future growth of Northern Alberta. Key issues and recommendations are included in this document. The conference report is available at www3.gov.ab.ca/nadc.

Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

NADC meets regularly with community and business leaders regarding northern development issues. In addition to these meetings, NADC holds a series of regional Leaders' Roundtable Meetings. The meetings provide individuals and organizations a chance to present their issues or concerns to the Council and to identify specific opportunities and possible barriers to development. Representatives from municipalities, Aboriginal groups, industry, business and community-based organizations meet with Council to discuss issues such as: transportation, value-added production opportunities, water management, regional cooperation, housing, community development and diversification of the northern economy. The meetings provide an excellent forum for face-to-face discussion of priority issues affecting Northern Alberta and offer all stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to possible solutions.

Since **Challenge NORTH 2000**, Leaders' Roundtable Meetings were held in:

Valleyview	Fairview	Cold Lake	Lac La Biche
Grande Cache	High Level	Fort Vermilion	Swan Hills
Athabasca	High Prairie	St. Paul	Grande Prairie

Format of this Report

This report reviews the economic issues and solutions raised at the **Challenge NORTH 2000** conference and at the Leaders' Roundtable meetings. Participants at these meetings did not prioritize these issues and suggestions for solutions. However, this information has provided a valuable basis for NADC to identify priorities and to respond effectively.

This report highlights key NADC responses, but does not include all follow-up activities, such as participation in meetings, providing letters of support and acting as an advocate on issues and concerns.

Recurring Priorities and Evolving Solutions

Northern priorities recur over time, although the specific needs and solutions evolve. Telecommunications infrastructure is an example. In the 1970s, the NADC was concerned about getting coin-radio-operated telephones to remote communities. A few years later, Northern Albertans wanted extended flat rate calling services, and then to change from party to private lines. Today, there is a need for high capacity lines for access to the Internet, to provide long distance delivery of services, and to remain competitive with the rest of Alberta and the global economy. While telecommunications infrastructure remains an issue, specific needs have changed and significant progress has been made.

Partnerships are the Key to Success

The degree of involvement and partnering with other organizations by NADC is evident in this report. It is essential that leaders and stakeholders from across Northern Alberta, other parts of Canada and the world meet to discuss issues and identify practical northern solutions. The strength and perseverance of a collective voice is important for the following reasons:

- to increase awareness of northern concerns,
- to focus proposals on solutions,
- to promote opportunities for development.

REVIEW OF NORTHERN ISSUES AND NADC RESPONSES

A. Northern Alberta's Economy

Introduction

Northern Alberta has a diverse resource base and is a key contributor to the Alberta economy. It has 100% of all of Alberta's oil sands production and 90% of its potentially productive forests. Almost 40% of Alberta's current conventional oil and gas development activity and about 20% of the province's agricultural land is in the NADC region. There is considerable potential in developing value-added resources, tourism and non-energy minerals.

Challenge NORTH 2000 Recommendations

Participants at the **Challenge NORTH 2000** conference noted two overarching principles in the economic development of Northern Alberta:

- *Local decision-making must be emphasized*
- *Solutions should be based on local needs*

Conference delegates made the following key recommendations regarding developing the economy of Northern Alberta:

Address infrastructure issues

- *Develop national and western transportation strategies for highways, rail and air; address lack of rail competition, access to rail cars; encourage a direct rail link to the Pacific*
- *Proceed with new road construction: build highway links in the northeast, create a new east-west connector road and hasten road upgrades*
- *Coordinate road construction with future plans of industry to build roads*
- *Request provincial participation in funding municipal, water and sewer systems*
- *Enhance fibre-optic, cable and satellite telecommunications systems*

Boost manufacturing and value-added opportunities

- *Develop local training and education*
- *Develop secondary processing opportunities*
- *Reduce government barriers: increase government support for value-added ventures, provide small local companies with greater access to federal government contracts and tailor government programs to northern needs*
- *Develop economic strategies: focus on long-term planning, lobby for better recovery of regional royalty dollars and initiate new northern-based programs*
- *Develop tourism initiatives*
- *Encourage e-commerce*

Increase opportunities for venture capital and research funds

- *Identify sources of risk capital*
- *Change policies of private and public lenders*
- *Improve access to loans for Métis Settlements, First Nations, remote and small communities*
- *Provide tax incentives to facilitate investment: allow creative tax incentives and reduce property and fuel taxes for the agricultural sector*

This section divides economic issues and the NADC responses into categories of Economic Development, Transportation, Infrastructure, Forestry, Agriculture, and Tourism.

1. Economic Development

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

Conference delegates identified the following issues:

- *Lack of unique northern strategies*
- *High demand for and lack of a skilled labour force*
- *Economy not sufficiently diverse*
- *Not enough land-use planning*
- *Unwieldy and unclear regulatory and approval processes*
- *Environmental and resource stewardship issues affect industrial development*
- *Northern communities struggle to access markets; they must have the ability to compete in the global market*
- *Lack of access to capital, research funds and seed capital*
- *Communities are isolated, working alone and there is disparity in economic benefits among communities*
- *High cost of doing business and a lack of business programs to assist northerners*
- *Revenue generated in the region is disproportionate to the amount reinvested*
- *Aboriginal people want more opportunities to participate in the mainstream economy*
- *Financial institutions' lending policies don't consider the northern situation*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

Business and Community leaders stated that:

- *There is a lack of access to capital, and assistance is needed in attracting investment*
- *The potential for wind power and/or clean coal technology should be evaluated*
- *Regional economic development initiatives are required*

NADC Responses

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is preparing a Northern Development Strategy.

In partnership with Western Economic Diversification and Alberta Energy, NADC commissioned a review of the impacts of, and the potential for, northern participation in the exploration and development of future non-energy mines in Northern Alberta. This information was presented at a workshop where participants made recommendations on the need for mapping geological formations and training programs.

Organized Opportunities Seminars in Slave Lake, High Level, Bonnyville, Athabasca, Valleyview, St. Paul and High Prairie. Speakers provided an overview of their sectors and identified new or unrealized opportunities in their area. Government organizations presented information on programs and services.

Continues to be involved in the development of the Peace Region Innovation Network Project.

Participated in community workshops held by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, which is preparing a Rural Development Strategy Plan.

Participated in workshops hosted by the Federal Rural Secretariat concerning the use of resources and information for rural-based research, and key northern economic development issues.

Participate in meetings of regional directors from federal and provincial departments and economic development organizations to discuss respective mandates and initiatives and potential collaboration on northern priorities.

Acting as resource advisors for GROWTH Alberta, a Pembina Hills Regional Economic Development Initiative. Member communities completed the initial organization requirements and prepared a profile of the region.

2. Transportation

Issues Raised At Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Air transport is costly and provides limited services*
- *There is insufficient rail competition and access to rail cars; there is no direct access to Canadian Pacific Railway and British Columbia Railway*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Northern Alberta needs scheduled airlines with affordable rates*
- *There needs to be increased awareness of the importance of air services to the North and its impact on development*
- *There should be an integrated rail strategy*
- *The impact of cumulative changes in rail services on roads, highways and communities must be considered*

NADC Responses

The highway and rail links between Prince Rupert and Northern Alberta are critical for the Northern Alberta economy. NADC continues to work with the Northwest Corridor Development Corporation on air, rail and road issues, including initiatives with northern communities affected by rail closures. NADC assisted the Corporation to prepare a ten-year strategic plan.

An analysis of the potential use of containers in the Alberta and British Columbia Peace Region is being completed in partnership with the County of Grande Prairie; Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Alberta Economic Development; the Northwest Corridor Development Corporation; and Alberta RailNet.

Provided assistance on an initiative to achieve scheduled airline services in Cold Lake. Peace Air has since expanded services to Cold Lake.

Commissioned a study on trends in aviation and airports in Northern Alberta and recommended steps to ensure the continued viability of this aspect of the economic and social wellbeing of northern communities. Meetings were held with representatives of aviation companies, municipal government officials and economic development groups examining the future viability of Northern Alberta airports.

Raised concerns regarding the potential closure of the Edmonton City Centre Airport and the devastating impact that this would have on Northern Alberta.

In partnership with Alberta Transportation, hired a consultant to attend a Northern Aviation workshop and to prepare a Terms of Reference for a study about potential air links between Alberta, Alaska and Russia (this is currently in the planning stages). The consultant also provided an update on the views of Alaska officials about a potential rail connection between Alaska and Canada.

Participated on an interdepartmental committee that assisted in the preparation of several provincial position papers concerning changes in the Canadian Transportation Act affecting rail and aviation companies and their clients.

3. Infrastructure

Issues Raised At Challenge NORTH 2000

- *The road system is inadequate and in disrepair*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Many highway and road infrastructure issues, resource roads*
- *Need high speed data linkage for business and education*
- *Water quality and distribution, wastewater and sewage systems*
- *Rising costs of electricity and natural gas*
- *Lack of municipal funding for infrastructure programs*

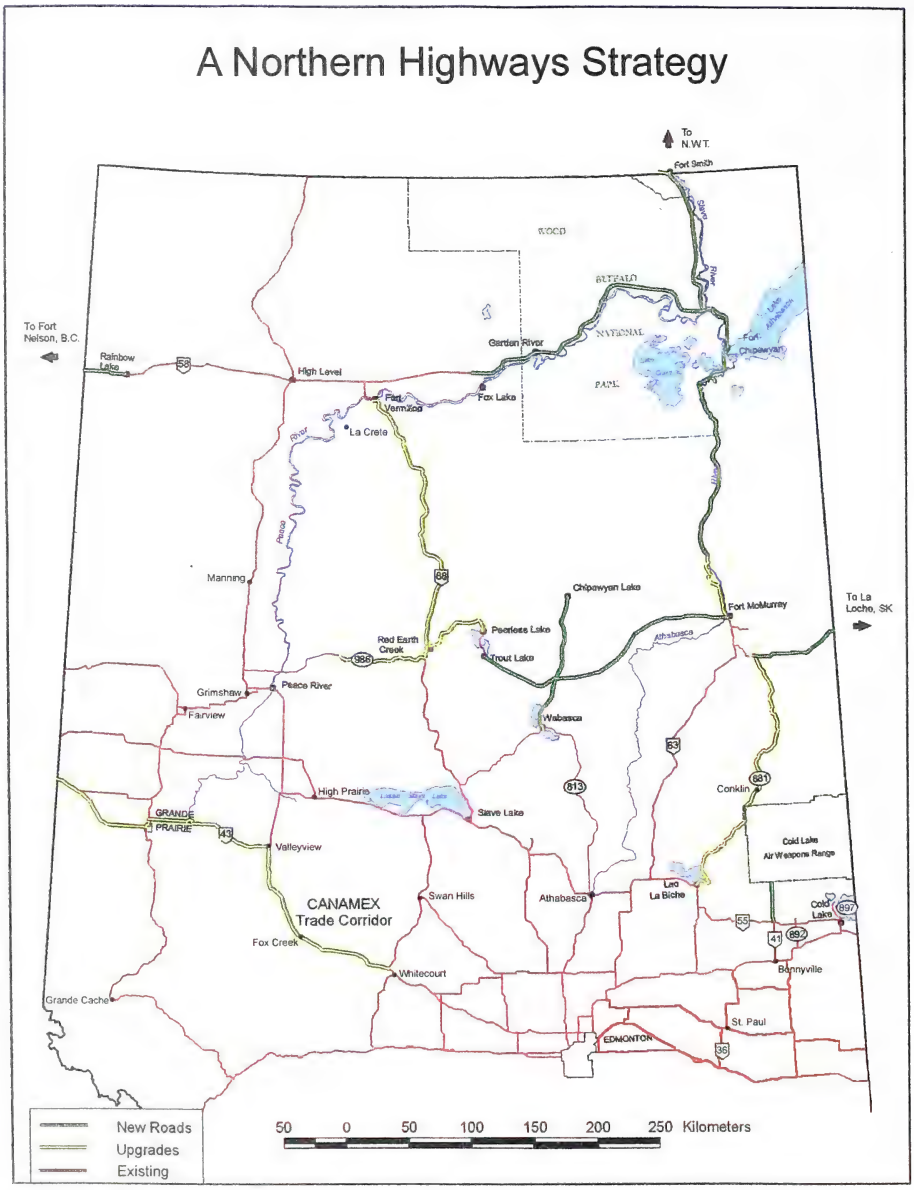
NADC Responses

Prepared a Position Paper that promoted the proposed highway connection between Rainbow Lake, Alberta and Fort Nelson, British Columbia.

Participated in a meeting of northern stakeholders about the Alberta SuperNet Project and its application to Northern Alberta. NADC monitors the progress of this project.

With Western Economic Diversification provided funding to Alberta-North, a partnership of six northern post-secondary institutions, to assist in its expansion from 24 to 40 off-main-campus sites. Funding was used to purchase equipment and resources to support distance education. These sites have communication links to main campuses and to each other enabling students to access courses, libraries and education services in their own communities.

In collaboration with Alberta Energy, held two information workshops in Northern Alberta on electricity supply, price, new opportunities and customer choice options.



Prepared a *Northern Highways Strategy*, in cooperation with northern municipalities and industry for the funding of northern highways to implement the *Northwestern Canada Integrated Road Concept Plan*. The proposal is a strategy based on special, one-time funding from Alberta Transportation. The plan outlined the benefits of the building and/or enhancement of these northern highways including increased resource development, access for remote communities, furthering inter-jurisdictional trade and commerce, and tourism opportunities. Alberta Transportation favourably received the Strategy, though current fiscal considerations may result in challenges to implementation. A map of the Alberta portion of the proposed system follows.

4. Agriculture

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Restrictive taxation policies, such as the farm fuel tax and property tax on farmland*
- *Loss of small farms*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Need more value-added agriculture initiatives, for example: community kitchens, abattoirs and ethanol plant*
- *Request for support for Cervid Harvesting Preserves*
- *Agriculture aid packages need to be fast-tracked*
- *Sale and availability of crown-owned agricultural land*
- *Opportunity for intensive livestock operations in Northern Alberta*
- *Threat to the cattle industry from diseased buffalo in Wood Buffalo National Park*
- *Protection of domestic fish stocks from predators*

NADC Responses

Works with its many partners in the Peace Agriculture Value Added Strategy working group (PAVASG) to develop stronger agriculture in the region. This project focuses on an awareness and promotion strategy related to processing and diversification in the Alberta and British Columbia Peace region. PAVASG commissioned a study entitled the *Peace Regional Value-added Agriculture Opportunity Analysis*. This project highlighted the competitive advantages of the Peace River region in terms of agricultural value-adding and identified sectors with potential for growth.

Assisted the Alberta Beekeepers Association with submissions to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency requesting a change in the Canadian Animal Health Act. The request was to open the Alberta-United States border for the importation of bees from California into Alberta.

Commissioned a report on market opportunities for Alternative Livestock Products in collaboration with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; the Métis Settlements General Council; and Elk, Wild Boar and Bison Producer Associations. This report assisted producers in developing marketing strategies.

Supported the Alberta Beef Team to attract beef producers to Northern Alberta.

In collaboration with Western Economic Diversification, provided funding to the Peace Country Bison Association to establish a long-term grazing pasture at the Dominion Research Farm at Fort Vermilion, and to conduct a series of tests on grazing practices, bison meat quality and freezing methods. This project assisted in the establishment of a meat-grading system for bison as well as developing a northern research site for bison.

Participates in meetings about the diseased bison in Wood Buffalo National Park.

Provided financial and other support for a study commissioned by the Northwest Corridor Development Corporation to determine the agricultural viability of land west of High Level.

Made a submission to the Provincial Government in support of the benefits of Cervid Hunting Preserves and of changes in protection of domestic fish stocks.

Supports the Branding the Peace initiative. This is an extensive marketing initiative designed to brand Peace Region products and services and market them to the world. The strategy will add value to the commodity-based agriculture community in the Peace Region of British Columbia and Alberta.

Supported the need for access to support services for agriculture in the North.

5. Forestry

Issues Raised At Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Need for value-added forestry development*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Impact of the United States softwood lumber tariffs*
- *Secure timber supply for mills*
- *Request for changes to the Forestry Act so that all industrial land users have a common reference point*
- *Secure timber supply for forest equipment operation training program*
- *Forest Management Area quota holders roles and responsibilities*
- *Forest protection plans for the North*
- *Purchase of private wood by forest manufacturing companies*

NADC Responses

Met with stakeholders to discuss wood allocation issues for secondary manufacturers.

Participates on an interdepartmental committee that is monitoring the impact of the United States softwood lumber tariffs.

Facilitated three meetings on commercial timber issues and prepared a summary of the proceedings: *Strategic Vision and Direction for Alberta's Forest Sector*.

Provides non-financial support to four Forest Education Societies based in Northern Alberta.

Acts as an advisor to the Woodland Operations Learning Foundation (WOLF), a not-for-profit organization with a mandate to provide forest industry equipment training in Northern Alberta. WOLF is advancing woodland operation training and skill development.

6. Tourism

Issues Raised At Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Tourism initiatives need to be developed*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Northern communities need support in developing and promoting product*
- *Marina development*

NADC Responses

Provides organizational, administrative and technical support to the Deh Cho Travel Connection group, an inter-jurisdictional tourism marketing society with membership from the Northwest Territories, Northeastern British Columbia and Alberta. The group's work focuses on the promotion of the Deh Cho circle tour route.

Completed a study on the economic impact of water access facilities in Northern Alberta as a way to promote water-based tourism opportunities.

In cooperation with The Northern Forum (see Interjurisdictional Initiatives), is examining on possible initiatives to advance northern tourism development.

Worked with local partners to organize the Northwest Alberta Tourism Summit. The group brought representatives from Economic Development Edmonton, the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Airports Authority to view area tourist attractions and to discuss how the regions can partner to offer more quality tourism products.

Participated in the Travel Alberta Fall Industry Conference – Tourism Together.

Part of a steering committee with regional economic development and tourism stakeholders to plan and develop a Northern Alberta Tourism Research Centre.

B. Northern Alberta's Environment

Introduction

Northern Albertans have indicated that wise use and management of the region's natural resources are essential to a healthy environment, a strong economy, and a high quality of life. The future of Northern Alberta depends on how well we balance these objectives.

Challenge NORTH 2000 Recommendations

Participants at the **Challenge NORTH 2000** conference made the following recommendations regarding environmental issues:

Ensure sustainable development

- *Engage in stakeholder discussion and consensus-building*
- *Conduct more comprehensive land-use planning*
- *Provide greater clarity regarding lands available for development*
- *Respond to global warming*

Create clear, concise government policies

- *Take a harmonized approach*
- *Develop clear resource-allocation guidelines*
- *Improve enforcement*

Balance environment, economy and quality of life

- *Improve communication and cooperation*
- *Improve education and awareness*
- *Monitor and improve environmental initiatives*
- *Identify and develop economic opportunities that address environmental issues*

Although this report does not separate the environmental issues into topics, NADC has focussed on issues relating to water, land usage and recycling.

Issues raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

Participants said Northern Alberta:

- *Lacks a vision or consensus on an overall plan*
- *Lacks communication and consultation among stakeholders*
- *Lacks local community input into decisions affecting the region*
- *Lacks awareness of environmental issues and of industry and government responses*
- *Has polarized views on environment issues*
- *Has inadequate land use planning*
- *Views may not be reflected in current environmental policies*
- *Must consider the effects of development on air, water and soil*
- *Has cumbersome governmental regulatory review and approval processes*
- *Has inadequate wildlife management of endangered species and declining fish stock*

- *Lacks fish, wildlife and environmental enforcement and deterrent penalties*
- *Has issues regarding the importation of toxic waste*
- *Must address the recreational impact on the environment*
- *Must address the inefficiencies in energy production and use*
- *Has insufficient reclamation initiatives*
- *Has limited recycling initiatives*
- *Has deficient reforestation policies, programs and standards*
- *Lacks comfort with industry self-monitoring*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

Business and community leaders expressed concern about these topics:

- *The relationship between economic development, the environment and quality of life*
- *Water policy*
- *Lake water levels and stabilization of these levels*
- *Riverbank erosion*
- *Greater public input regarding Swan Hills toxic waste plant and spill risk*
- *Environmental management of special wastes and economic impact on the local region*
- *Forest fire impact on wildlife and resource development*
- *Fish and wildlife management*
- *Air quality*

NADC Responses

NADC submitted *Water Strategy for Alberta; The Challenges, Objectives, and Guiding Principles: A Northern Perspective* to the Minister of Environment. It is anticipated that the new Provincial Water Strategy will be released by April 2003. These are the ten recommendations that were presented to the department:

1) The focus of water programs should be on conservation and priority use.
2) Local and regional conditions should be the basis for applying regulations or guidelines to management practices in the different areas of the province. The unique characteristics of major river basin and sub-basin management area should be considered independently.
3) Improved water management practices should be considered to protect the integrity of existing surface water and groundwater aquifers.
4) A review should be undertaken of practices regarding the use of potable water, particularly from lakes and groundwater, for industrial and agricultural use.
5) Potential investments in developments that require large volumes of water should be encouraged to adopt improved consumption practices, or locate in areas where water supplies are more secure.
6) Inter-basin water transfer should not be considered, as the risk is too high.
7) A thorough program to map all groundwater sources throughout the province should be undertaken.
8) A review or water infrastructure programs for municipalities should be undertaken.
9) The system of gathering and disseminating water information intended for public use should be improved.
10) Other matters relating to the use and management of water that should be considered include: accurate data acquisition, low-cost storage, municipal infrastructure, flood and erosion mitigation, pollution, and wildlife habitat.

Collaborated with federal and provincial departments, municipalities and regional health authorities on the *Water Information Base Project* in the Northwest Boreal Region. The project highlighted the information that was available and the gaps that needed to be addressed. The information was presented to municipalities in the region. Subsequent to this, Prairie Farm and Rehabilitation Administration secured funds to conduct initial groundwater mapping of the region to identify water sources, water quality and contamination risk. Further follow-up on water issues is taking place for both the Northwest Boreal Region and the Athabasca - Cold Lake Region.

Arranged videoconferences to link northern organizations to a series of Chamber of Alberta Resources workshops on environmental regulations and economic development.

Commissioned a study to identify opportunities for Confined Feeding Operations and to identify barriers in local decision-making, land-use planning and issues related to the public acceptance of this sector. The study concluded that an increase in the production of livestock, and particularly intensive livestock operations, is potentially an environmentally and economically viable option for Northern Alberta. This study also supported the need for the water management studies outlined above.

Assisted the Northern Coordinated Action for Recycling Enterprises (Northern CARE) with the preparation of a three-year business plan for the organization and presentations at workshops on recycling.

Continues to work with municipal governments, industries and community organizations on activities that enhance the economic development opportunities associated with recycling in Northern Alberta.

C. Northern Alberta Human Resources and Services

Introduction

An acceptable level of social infrastructure is essential to support economic growth and add to the quality of life. Participants at **Challenge NORTH 2000** and Leaders' Roundtable Meetings raised the general issue that funding and services to Northern Albertans are not sufficiently tailored to the region. The need to have programs that apply to everyone in the province conflicts with the need to adapt these programs to special needs and costs of operating in rural and northern communities. Northern Albertans have raised concerns about policies, programs and funding formulas for health, education, libraries, policing and many other government services.

Challenge NORTH 2000 Recommendations

Participants at the **Challenge NORTH 2000** conference made the following recommendations regarding human resources and service issues:

Address shortage of educated and skilled people

- *Create job-ready students and develop responsive educational programming/curricula*
- *Secure community and industry commitment to train local people*
- *Enter into partnerships*
- *Increase local training and apprenticeships*
- *Provide early exposure to trades*
- *Develop recruitment strategies*
- *Ensure flexible delivery of education*

Provide affordable housing

- *Increase funding for social housing*
- *Attract new investments*

Address community issues

- *Improve access to health care services*
- *Increase access to social services*
- *Develop unique northern strategies to address human resource issues*
- *Address the high cost of policing services*
- *Build better communities through better planning*

This report divides "Human Resources and Services" into the categories of Education and Training, Recruitment and Retention, Municipal, Community Support Systems, Housing, Health, and Law Enforcement.

1. Education and Training

Northern Albertans need to be well educated and skilled in order to take advantage of available economic opportunities. NADC is directing a considerable portion of its resources to address education and training issues and opportunities.

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

Participants identified the following issues:

- *High cost of delivering services and inadequate funding formulas*
- *High dropout rates from school*
- *High cost of post-secondary education*
- *Lack of assistance for northern students*
- *High demand and shortage of skilled workers*
- *High average age of entry to apprenticeship programs and under-utilized training institutions*
- *Insufficient oil, gas and forestry training programs in the North*
- *Outdated, non-standardized apprenticeship classifications, regulations and licenses*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

Business and community leaders expressed concern about these topics:

- *Need for quality education in Northern Alberta*
- *Per capita funding does not meet northern needs, high cost of doing business*
- *Unequal opportunities for students in small schools which struggle to provide a core academic program; other programming and services such as counseling are virtually non-existent in some schools*
- *Assistance is needed to develop distance education*
- *High drop-out rates and declining enrollment*
- *Shortage of skilled trades*
- *Increased requirements for firefighters*
- *Need to promote and develop youth leadership in the north*
- *Need to share resources*
- *Support funding of northern forestry and social work programs*

NADC Responses

The following NADC programs address education and training.

Northern LINKS

Northern LINKS was established as a funding program to ease the transition from high school to post-secondary training. The overall purpose has been broadened to include encouraging completion of school. Schools, communities, businesses and Aboriginal organizations can apply for funding for projects such as Campus Tours, Career Fairs, Orientation Sessions or Mentorship Programs. The program targets Grade 9 to 12 and first year post-secondary students. The program has funded over 150 projects since April 1, 2000.

Bursary Programs
NADC and Alberta Learning jointly offer three bursary programs as a way to develop northern skill levels. These programs increase students' financial capacity to access post-secondary education, while encouraging graduates to work in Northern Alberta.

1) **NADC Bursary**
   The NADC Bursary is a $3,000 return service bursary (one year of return service for each bursary) available to Alberta students in the last two years of their program. From April 1, 2000, 351 bursaries were awarded to students for a total value of $1,031,500.
2) **Bursary Partnership Program**
   Through Bursary Partnerships, the NADC co-sponsors bursaries with industry, small businesses and community organizations for post-secondary students. Since April 1, 2000, seventy-one sponsors contributed over $450,000 and sponsored 384 bursaries. The total value of the bursaries is $859,750.
3) **Northern Student Supplement**
   The Northern Student Supplement is a bursary for first- and second-year northern post-secondary students in financial need. It supplements the province-wide Alberta Opportunities Bursary. In the last two academic years, over 1200 students received the award for a total of $1,485,440.

Northern Alberta Labour Market Information Clearinghouse
NADC coordinated a series of studies under the Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse Project, which is a partnership with five northern colleges. The studies link employment demands in Northern Alberta to post-secondary education programs.

NADC also addressed education and training issues through these additional initiatives.

In cooperation with Alberta Learning, NADC is initiating a pilot project to increase awareness of apprenticeship training opportunities among students in lower grades. Youth will be able to obtain apprenticeship accreditation at an earlier age. This will help to address the shortage of skilled tradespeople in Northern Alberta.

NADC assisted a Council of Stakeholders consisting of northern employers, community representatives, post-secondary institutions to resolve a longstanding shortage of qualified social workers in northern communities. In collaboration with stakeholders from southern Alberta, this group successfully worked towards the development of a University of Calgary social work degree program with content tailored to northern rural and Aboriginal communities. The group won a Bronze 2001 Premiers Award of Excellence for their efforts. Recently stakeholders came together at a Northern Alberta Social Work Education Summit to plan towards a continuum of social work education including the Diploma and Masters level.

Two other educational initiatives are mentioned elsewhere in this report:

Funding to Alberta-North to support distance education (see Infrastructure)

Support to the Woodland Operations Learning Foundation (see Forestry)

2. Recruitment and Retention

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

- *The cost to recruit and retain workers is high*
- *Industry's human resources policies do not reflect northern situations*
- *Young workers are migrating south*
- *There is insufficient industry commitment to training*
- *The North lacks incentives to attract and retain qualified people*
- *The lack of housing, services and recreational facilities in remote and high-growth communities hinders recruitment*
- *The northern living allowance is insufficient*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *It is difficult to attract professionals to remote areas, particularly specialties*
- *Health regions experience difficulty attracting healthcare professionals*

NADC Responses

The Northern Focus Human Resources Management Conference was held in Peace River in May 2000. One hundred and twenty five employers and human resource managers from across Northern Alberta attended this conference. It offered participants from different sectors the opportunity to meet, learn about new human resource management concepts and share common issues. This led to a second successful Northern Focus conference in Fort McMurray held in October 2002, which drew over 100 participants. NADC assisted local steering committees to organize the conferences. The successful networking, speakers and discussion with a northern focus may lead to a third conference in a different region.

NADC is working with northern regional health authorities, post-secondary education institutions and other northern organizations to increase the number of students completing their practicum in Northern Alberta. NADC is currently completing a review of housing supports offered by northern employers to practicum students.

Opportunity North is a new recruitment and retention marketing initiative developed by NADC in consultation with employer representatives. Opportunity North materials are available free of charge to northern public and private employers in their recruitment campaigns. The project centres on the www.opportunitynorth.ca website, but also includes a CD-ROM, logo, brochure and business card. The website features information about work, communities and life in Northern Alberta and has hundreds of links to other northern websites. It includes images of the North, maps, and some games. The card-sized CD-ROM includes the same information, but with less text and more sound.

opportunity north.ca
your connection to Alberta's north

3. Municipal

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Landfill regulations are costly for municipalities*
- *Municipalities lack funding*

Issues Raised at Leaders Roundtable Meetings

- *Ensure municipal voice in decision-making about Aboriginal land and resource issues*
- *Inter-municipal planning and cooperation*
- *Rising costs*
- *Distribution of the Alberta Centennial Legacy Grant*
- *Provincial and federal boundaries review*
- *Aboriginal input into management, conservation and development of resources*
- *Impact of changing demographics on communities*
- *Need for greater attention on northern rural and urban communities and their issues*
- *Sustainability of libraries*

NADC Responses

Submissions were made regarding the Provincial and Federal Electoral Division Areas, Boundaries and Names reviews. Several items were raised regarding the Provincial review to the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission including:

1) Concern over the possible loss of a northern constituency: "Eliminating the Athabasca-Wabasca Constituency will have a dramatic impact on northern representation in the Legislature. This will reduce to merely 11 representatives, our coverage for an area of fully two-thirds of the Province."
2) Trading area and socio-economic connections: Some of the recommended electoral boundaries do not take into account trading patterns and/or socio-economic connections.
3) Balancing rural-urban and northern representation: "The current and projected growth in Northern Alberta greatly contributes to the economic well being of the Province of Alberta. It represents a significant contribution to the provincial economy. Due to this and other considerations, it is important for Northern Alberta to have fair and effective representation in the Alberta Legislature. The loss of even one northern electoral division seriously compromises northern electoral representation."

Recommendations in the submission to the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission included:

1) The current number of Members of Parliament that represent Northern Alberta not be reduced.
2) Any proposed changes to the current federal electoral boundaries take into account: the balancing of rural and urban interests; socio-economic connections; the degree of difficulty to serve; and the number of communities served by a Member of Parliament.

Demographic and economic statistics data were provided to organizations upon request.

NADC meets with municipalities on a regular basis to discuss areas regional development issues and receive input on strategies on the North.

NADC provided assistance to municipalities on other inter-municipal initiatives, including an inter-municipal plan and a feasibility study for a joint ambulance facility.

4. Community Support Systems

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Communities trying to tackle issues alone*
- *Lack of community support systems to deal with poverty, family violence and addictions*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Loss of tax revenue due to elevator closure*
- *Impact on communities of farm and grain elevator consolidation*

NADC Responses

NADC is providing support to communities by addressing specific issues such as improving northern transportation and infrastructure, supporting value-added initiatives and addressing human resource concerns.

5. Housing

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Increase funding for social housing*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *High costs of operating seniors' lodges*
- *Need for senior, community and special needs housing*
- *Need for student accommodation*

NADC Responses

Assistance was provided to the High Level region to conduct a housing workshop. As a result of this workshop, there was increased investment in housing in the region.

6. Health

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Per capita funding formulas do not meet northern needs*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Inadequate levels of ambulance services and funding and high related operational costs*
- *Need for new health care facilities*
- *Amalgamation and funding for Regional Health Authorities*

NADC Responses

Focused its attention concerning health issues on the recruitment and retention of professionals. As indicated under Recruitment and Retention, the NADC developed the Opportunity North recruitment materials and is currently assessing how practicum students might be assisted.

Participating in a new initiative with the Rural Physician Action Plan. This initiative will provide information on professional practices, quality of life expectations of physicians and their families and successful integration of the physician and the family into the community.

Increased the NADC Bursary's limit to $5,000 for medical students. Students are able to receive this bursary for up to four years. Communities are able to match the bursary with an additional $5,000 per year.

7. Law Enforcement

Issues Raised at Challenge NORTH 2000

- *Law enforcement costs*

Issues Raised at Leaders' Roundtable Meetings

- *Rural and urban policing costs*

NADC Responses

NADC presented a position paper to the Alberta Solicitor-General, regarding the costs of providing police services in northern urban municipalities with the following recommendations:

1) That the Provincial Government immediately provide "bridge funding" for the following municipalities, in order to address the extraordinarily disproportionate amount they pay for policing services: the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, and the Towns of High Level, High Prairie, Lac La Biche and Slave Lake. The funding should be provided during the transition period from the current system to a reformed system of police services funding.
2) That the Provincial Government implement a "fair and equitable" system of funding participation from rural and urban municipalities of all sizes, for the provision of policing in all communities that use RCMP contracted service.
3) That the Provincial Government adopt a policy that establishes criteria for levels of service, facilities and equipment, that takes into account the unique circumstances, characteristics and needs of northern communities in regard to the provision of police services.
4) That, in areas of high growth, discussion of strategies between the Provincial Government, Municipalities, the RCMP and Industry be undertaken to encourage possible partnership arrangements for police services.
5) That the Provincial Government establish and fund a special program that will provide a mobile RCMP unit, that can assist a detachment where a major incident has taken place, or on a temporary basis can supplement a high activity area where the existing compliment of officers cannot keep up with the demand for service.
6) That a review of facility requirements be undertaken for Northern Alberta detachments, especially in municipalities with severe facility problems such as in the Town of High Level, with a view to finding funding solutions that will decrease the financial impact on the host municipality when a facility must be replaced and/or significantly upgraded.

7) That a review of Federal and Provincial socio-economic policies be undertaken, with a view to addressing causes of increased crime rates, especially in northern areas with a high Aboriginal population. The review should address subjects such as poverty, skill development, and effective Aboriginal participation in the economy, with the goal of reducing policing costs in the long term.
8) That the Provincial Government require Aboriginal-based police forces to establish operational protocols with the RCMP, using models in communities where this service has proven successful.
9) That the RCMP look at practical ways and means to increase the level of Aboriginal officers and staff members in northern detachments located in areas of high Aboriginal population.

Interjurisdictional Collaboration

Many of the opportunities and challenges that Northern Albertans are addressing are of similar importance in other northern jurisdictions. NADC is increasing its efforts to collaborate with other jurisdictions to address common issues.

The Northern Forum

The Northern Forum includes membership from twenty-seven northern regions from ten countries. The mandate of the organization is to promote cooperation and exchange information on northern-based socio-economic initiatives. The Province of Alberta is the North American representative on the Executive Committee. NADC is the Province's Secretariat for The Northern Forum. The Government of Alberta hosted The Northern Forum's 5th General Assembly in 2001. The NADC planned and organized this successful international event.

At the General Assembly, The Northern Forum Governors adopted both a three year Strategic Action Plan and the *Alberta Declaration.* The *Alberta Declaration* focuses on advancing the socio-economic development of the North, and encourages Aboriginal participation in the northern economy. As part of the General Assembly, a very successful *Northern Alberta Business Leaders Roundtable* brought together northern business and international leaders to discuss future opportunities for northern development.

Youth Eco-Forum

NADC and the Mackenzie Forest Education Society supported the Youth Eco-Forum in which youth from other Northern Forum members including Heilongjiang Province, China; Oulu Province, Finland; Hokkaido Prefecture, Japan; Alaska and Russia discussed environmental issues. They visited ecological sites in the Edmonton area and prepared a Youth Eco-Declaration that was presented to the United Nations.

Northern Development Ministers' Forum

Northern Development Ministers from across Canada meet annually to plan actions on common issues. NADC supports this collaborative effort as Alberta's Secretariat for the Forum. For the most recent Northern Ministers Forum held in Peace River, NADC prepared a proposal for a northern awareness and recruitment campaign, profiled NADC's Opportunity North materials and contributed Northern Alberta information for a national *Recruitment And Retention Best Practices Inventory*.

Alberta-Northwest Territories Memorandum of Understanding

NADC acts as Alberta's Secretariat for the Alberta-Northwest Territories Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation and Development. Through the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding, Alberta and the Northwest Territories have worked on initiatives related to tourism, economic development, transportation, skill development and education. Northern research and innovation have recently been added as priority topics.

Looking to the Future

The theme for **Challenge NORTH 2003** is Opportunities, Strategies, Success.

Global and national trends and decisions have an increasing impact on Northern Alberta. Northern Albertans need to be aware and proactive to adjust to globalization of markets; environmental concerns; advances in technology; geopolitical changes and issues; and the competition and mobility for entrepreneurs, labour and capital.

The Provincial Government has eliminated deficits and reduced debt, the economy remains strong; and Alberta has a positive attitude towards business. Northern Alberta is contributing significantly to the well-being of Alberta's economy and government services.

Although Northern Alberta has high levels of investment, this is concentrated in a few regions. The region still has many challenges that need to be addressed if Northern Albertans are to maximize their contribution to the productivity of Alberta and to enjoy the benefits of development in the region.

The introduction to this report raised several questions:

- *What practical strategies are required to advance social and economic development in Northern Alberta?*
- *How is development to be balanced with protection of the environment?*
- *What must be done to address Northern Albertans' needs and improve the quality of life?*
- *Who should be responsible for the strategies and how should it be done?*

These are difficult questions. There are no magic solutions, but the vision of leaders, regional collaboration and common goals are key factors in determining the success of a region.

The Northern Alberta Development Council looks forward to meeting you at **Challenge NORTH 2003: Opportunities, Strategies, Success** and hearing your advice regarding the development of Northern Alberta.

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